

Committee on International Relations

Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats

Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly

Serbia: Current Developments and Future Direction

September 20, 2006

Today, the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats is holding a hearing on current developments in Serbia and the future direction of that country.

This is an important moment in Serbia's democratic transition six years after Slobodan Milosevic was forced from power. Serbia's direction over the next decade will largely depend on how two key issues and events play out over the next 12 to 18 months.

- First, the future status of Kosovo, the Serbian province that has been under UN control since the end of the Kosovo War in 1999, will be determined within the next three months.
- Second, the alleged Serb war criminal, Radtko Mladic, is still at large. The international community is increasing its pressure on Serbia to apprehend Mladic and turn him over to the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague.

These two issues are also important because of their impact on the upcoming parliamentary elections in Serbia, which are scheduled for no later than December of next year. If the elections are held after the Kosovo negotiations are complete, there is an increased likelihood that the extreme nationalist Radical Party will make gains or possibly be able to form a coalition government. If this were to happen, it would lead to a series of policies - such as non-cooperation on capturing Mladic - that would set back Serbia's relations with the U.S. and Europe.

Furthermore, even if the democratically-oriented political parties stay in power, the way in which Serbia deals with the outcome of the Kosovo negotiations and the war criminal issue will set the stage for Serbia's bilateral relations with the United States, its timetable for integration into NATO and the European Union, and Serbia's relations with its neighbors in the Balkans.

In my view, U.S. policy toward Serbia should follow a two-track approach. On the first track, we should continue to insist that the Serbian government do everything in its power to track down and apprehend Mladic and other outstanding war criminals. This is a non-negotiable position. Serbia would be well-advised to look at Croatia's cooperation in locating and arresting General Gotovina in the Canary Islands. This was a difficult move for Croatia, but it has paved the way for accelerated negotiations for both NATO and EU membership.

At the same time, the U.S. should pursue a policy of engagement with Serbia on many different levels, including military and intelligence cooperation, and stronger economic ties. Once Mladic is apprehended, we should quickly open negotiations with Serbia regarding their possible NATO membership. In addition, we should be encouraging our European allies to make clear EU membership would be on the table depending on Serbia resolving the war criminal issue and their acceptance of the U.N.-brokered solution on Kosovo.

Although Serbia is undergoing a challenging period, I believe it has the potential to be strong ally of the United States and a pivotal country in the economic and political resurgence of the Balkan region. We should note that Serbia has already successfully met one important challenge by the manner in which they accepted the results of the referendum that led to independence of Montenegro.

I look forward to the testimony of our three witnesses on the situation in Serbia and what steps the U.S. can take to help Serbia move in the right direction.

I will now turn to Mr. Wexler for any opening statement he may wish to make.